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The Indian Navy

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The Indian Navy

The Indian Navy began more than 400 years ago as a trading company's little fleet. Today it sails two aircraft carriers, one of them built entirely in India. This lesson walks through its history, its structure, its carriers and its newest ships.

The Indian Navy, at a glance

From a company fleet to a carrier navy

01
Roots

1612, when the East India Company formed its own small fleet.

02
Name

Became the Indian Navy on 26 January 1950.

03
Structure

Three commands: Mumbai, Visakhapatnam and Kochi.

04
Carriers

INS Vikramaditya (2013) and INS Vikrant (2022), both based at Karwar.

Aircraft carrierA huge warship that works like a floating airfield for fighter jets.

Carrier battle groupA carrier plus the escort ships and submarines that protect it.
IndigenousDesigned and built inside the country, not bought from abroad.
CommissionedFormally made part of the Navy, ready for service.

How did a trading fleet become the Indian Navy?

Must Know



Four centuries, one line: from a company's escort ships to a home-built carrier.

Where did it all begin?

In **1612**, the East India Company set up a small fleet. Its job was simple: protect the company's trading ships from pirates and rivals. That small fleet is the seed of today's Navy.

How many times did the name change?

- The fleet changed names several times as control passed from hand to hand.
- In 1934, under the British Crown, it became the **Royal Indian Navy**.
- On **26 January 1950**, it became simply the **Indian Navy**.
- That was the very day India's Constitution came into force and India became a republic.

Here's the trap. Many students guess 15 August 1947. But the "Royal" tag stayed until India became a republic.

> **Quick check 1.** Q1. True or False: The Royal Indian Navy became the Indian Navy on 15 August 1947. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

How is the Navy organised to guard two coastlines?

Must Know

What are the three commands?

India has a long coastline on two seas. So the Navy splits its work into **three commands**. Each has its own headquarters.



Motto: "Sam No Varunah" (Rig Veda)

A simple chart, not a map. Two commands fight; one trains.

- **Western Naval Command**, at Mumbai, looks after the Arabian Sea side.
- **Eastern Naval Command**, at Visakhapatnam, looks after the Bay of Bengal side.
- **Southern Naval Command**, at **Kochi**, mainly trains officers and sailors.

Why split it this way?

Think of a school with two big gates. You post one guard at each gate. Then you keep a third team for training new guards. Both coasts stay watched, while the next batch learns.

What is the Navy's motto?

The motto is **"Sam No Varunah"**. It comes from the Rig Veda. It means "may the Lord of the Oceans be auspicious to us".

Quick check 2. Q2. True or False: The Southern Naval Command, at Kochi, is mainly a training command. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Remember this: West = Mumbai. East = Visakhapatnam. South = Kochi, for training. The Navy got its present name on 26 January 1950.

What are India's two aircraft carriers?

Good to Know



INS Vikrant (R11) and INS Vikramaditya (R33) sailing together with their carrier battle group. Photo: Indian Navy, GODL-India.

What is INS Vikramaditya?

- It began life as the Soviet-era carrier **Admiral Gorshkov**.
- Russia rebuilt it for India.
- It was commissioned on **16 November 2013**.



INS Vikramaditya underway. Photo: Indian Navy, CC0.

What is INS Vikrant?

- It is India's **first home-built aircraft carrier**.
- Cochin Shipyard Limited built it.
- It is the largest and most complex warship ever built in India.
- It was commissioned on 2 September 2022.

Where do the two carriers live?

Both carriers now share one home base: **INS Kadamba at Karwar**, in Karnataka. Each carrier leads its own **carrier battle group** of escort ships. Two groups mean India can cover a lot more sea at once.

Quick check 3. Q3. True or False: INS Vikramaditya was rebuilt from a Russian carrier, the Admiral Gorshkov. *(True or False?)*

See answer ↓

Quick check 4. Q4. True or False: INS Vikrant was built by Mazagon Dock in Mumbai. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Why is INS Vikrant such a big deal?

Good to Know

What changed with Vikrant?

For decades, India bought its carriers from abroad. Vikrant broke that habit. India **designed and built it at home**. Only a handful of countries can build a carrier.

Why is a carrier so hard to build?

A carrier is like a small floating town with an airport on top. Many hard skills must work together.

- Special steel strong enough for the hull and flight deck.
- Engines powerful enough to move a giant ship.
- Weapons, radars and aircraft systems that all talk to each other.
- The design skill to fit it all together.

What does India gain?

- **Self-reliance:** India no longer waits on a foreign seller for its biggest ships.
- **Jobs and skills:** the orders, work and know-how stay in Indian shipyards.
- **Reach:** two carrier groups can cover both the eastern and western seas.

Think it through, before reading on. Vikramaditya is older and was bought abroad. Why does India still keep it, now that it can build carriers at home?

Show the explanation

One carrier cannot be at sea all the time. Every big ship needs long breaks for repairs. With two carriers, one can sail while the other is fixed. And India's seas are wide, with an east and a west side. So the second carrier is not extra. It keeps India's sea power going without gaps.

What does the Navy do across the Indian Ocean?

Great to Know

What role does India claim at sea?

India sees itself as a main keeper of peace and safety across the **Indian Ocean Region**. Most of India's trade moves by sea. So safe sea lanes matter for India's economy too.

What are some of its named missions?

- **Operation Sankalp** began in June 2019. It protects Indian-flagged ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Mission Sagar-II**, in 2020, saw INS Airavat carry food aid to Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti and Kenya.
- The Navy also runs **HADR** work: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, after cyclones or tsunamis.

Why does this matter?

A strong navy is like a good neighbour with a big boat. It guards its own house. It also helps others when storms hit. That builds trust with smaller countries around the Indian Ocean.

> **Quick check 5.** Q5. True or False: Operation Sankalp protects Indian-flagged ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Exam Angle

What have exams asked about the Indian Navy?

> **Asked before**
> **PYQ 1 · UPSC CSP 2016, Q46**
> Which one of the following is the best description of 'INS Astradharini', that was in the news recently?
>
> (a) Amphibious warfare ship
> (b) Nuclear-powered submarine
> (c) Torpedo launch and recovery vessel
> (d) Nuclear-powered aircraft carrier
>
> mcqquestion.com/upsc-pre/upsc-csp-2016-general-studies-paper-i-full-question-paper/#q46

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> **Quick check 6.** Q6. True or False: INS Astradharini is a torpedo launch and recovery vessel. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What new ships and decisions came in August 2026?

Current Affairs

What is Samarthak?

- On **27 August 2026**, L&T delivered **Samarthak** to the Navy at its Kattupalli shipyard, near Chennai.
- It is the Navy's first home-built **Multi-Purpose Vessel**.
- Over 75% of it is made in India.
- Its main job is testing new weapons and systems. It can also patrol, watch the sea and help in disasters.

(Source: Naval Technology)

What is INS Nipun?

- INS Nipun was commissioned on **31 August 2026**, at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai.
- It is the second **Nistar-class Diving Support Vessel**.
- Hindustan Shipyard Limited, Visakhapatnam, designed and built it.
- It supports diving down to 300 metres. It can also act as a mother ship for submarine rescue.

(Source: Marine Insight)

What did the Defence Ministry decide about missiles?

- On 25 August 2026, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh approved a big transfer of technology.
- DRDO will hand its technology for all **conventional** missile systems to Indian industry.
- Strategic missiles, such as the Agni series, are not part of it.

- The aim is more missiles made in India, by Indian firms.

(Source: DD India)

> **Quick check 7.** Q7. True or False: INS Nipun is a stealth frigate commissioned in August 2026. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick Q&A

When did the Navy's story begin?

In 1612, with the East India Company's small fleet.

Which command is at Visakhapatnam?

Eastern Naval Command.

Which shipyard built INS Vikrant?

Cochin Shipyard Limited.

Where are both carriers based now?

INS Kadamba, at Karwar in Karnataka.

Who delivered Samarthak to the Navy?

Larsen & Toubro (L&T), on 27 August 2026.

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Practice MCQs

1. On what date did the Royal Indian Navy become simply the "Indian Navy"?

A. 2 October 1950

B. 15 August 1947

C. 26 January 1950

D. 26 November 1949

See answer ↓

2. The Indian Navy is organised into how many operational commands, based at Mumbai, Visakhapatnam, and Kochi respectively?

A. Two — Western and Eastern only

B. Three — Western, Eastern, and Southern

C. Five

D. Four, including a Northern Command

See answer ↓

3. Which Naval Command is headquartered at Kochi and primarily handles training?

A. Southern Naval Command

B. Western Naval Command

C. Central Naval Command

D. Eastern Naval Command

See answer ↓

4. INS Vikramaditya, commissioned in 2013, was rebuilt from a ship of which navy?

A. The Russian Navy

B. The United States Navy

C. The French Navy

D. The Royal Navy (UK)

See answer ↓

5. What makes INS Vikrant, commissioned in September 2022, significant beyond its size?

A. It was built entirely in Russia

B. It is India's first indigenously built aircraft carrier

C. It is a submarine, not a surface ship

D. It is India's oldest surviving warship

See answer ↓

6. India's two aircraft carriers are now both homeported at which naval base?

A. INS Angre, Mumbai

B. INS Chilka, Odisha

C. INS Shivaji, Lonavala

D. INS Kadamba, Karwar

See answer ↓

7. 'INS Astradharini', which was in the news, is best described as a?

A. Nuclear-powered submarine

B. Torpedo launch-and-recovery vessel

C. Nuclear-armed aircraft carrier

D. Amphibious warfare ship

See answer ↓

8. INS Nipun, commissioned in August 2026, is what type of naval vessel?

A. Mine countermeasure vessel

B. Stealth frigate

C. Diving Support Vessel

D. Fleet tanker

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** The force was renamed the Indian Navy on 26 January 1950, the day India became a republic. ↑ Q1
2. **B.** The Navy has Western (Mumbai), Eastern (Visakhapatnam), and Southern (Kochi) Commands. ↑ Q2
3. **A.** Southern Naval Command, headquartered at Kochi, mainly handles training. ↑ Q3
4. **A.** INS Vikramaditya was converted from the Russian Navy's Admiral Gorshkov before its 2013 commissioning. ↑ Q4
5. **B.** INS Vikrant is India's first indigenously built aircraft carrier, built by Cochin Shipyard Limited, and the largest warship ever built in India. ↑ Q5
6. **D.** Both INS Vikramaditya and INS Vikrant are homeported at INS Kadamba, in Karwar, Karnataka. ↑ Q6
7. **B.** INS Astradharini serves as a torpedo launch-and-recovery vessel. ↑ Q7
8. **C.** INS Nipun is the second Nistar-class Diving Support Vessel. It supports deep-sea diving and submarine rescue. ↑ Q8

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** ↑ 1
2. **True.** ↑ 2
3. **True.** ↑ 3
4. **False.** ↑ 4
5. **True.** ↑ 5
6. **True.** ↑ 6
7. **False.** ↑ 7

Previous year answers

1. **(c) Torpedo launch and recovery vessel** INS Astradharini is India’s first indigenously designed torpedo launch and recovery vessel. It was commissioned in October 2015 at Visakhapatnam, replacing the earlier INS Astravahini.

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